



**1439/0Housing Committee, February 5, 2015, New Haven
Testimony from Diana Deng, Policy and Communications Analyst at the
Partnership for Strong Communities
In opposition to HB5055, 5306, 5577, 5579, 5581**

Chairman Butler, Chairman Holder-Winfield, Sen. Hwang, Rep. Kupchick, Honorable Committee Members,

My name is Diana Deng and I work as a Policy and Communications Analyst at the Partnership for Strong Communities. I am in Connecticut because it was an excellent place for a college education and it provided a nurturing environment to develop my skills and to build a career. But I, like many of my young professional colleagues who have moved from Connecticut over the last two decades, need affordable places to live. And there are not enough of them here in Connecticut. That is why I have come tonight to tell you I strongly oppose HB5055, 5306, 5577, 5579, 5581 and the many other bills related to the 8-30g statute that would repeal or seriously weaken it.

At Partnership I run an initiative called YES (Young Energetic Solutions) which strives to empower young professionals to become involved in their communities. There are bright, hard-working people on the Steering Committee, many of whom have expressed similar concerns about the lack of housing choices in this state because 10% of the housing stock is affordable in only 31 of the 169 towns in the state. Affordability means that we would pay no more than 30% of our incomes toward housing. Rather than buying a home, or setting their roots in the state, many rent due to the lack of housing options that are both affordable and contain the amenities they are looking for. More than a few have ultimately left the state.

At the heart of this issue is the "housing wage". The "housing wage" as measured by the National Low Income Housing Coalition is \$23.02/hour in Connecticut, or about \$48,000/year to afford a typical two-bedroom apartment in our state. Even those of us who are on the track to decently paying careers have to start somewhere and work for years before we earn salaries that afford us a "housing wage". For example, those who are preschool teachers earn a median annual income of \$31,000 or those who are in accounting earn a median annual income of \$42,000. EMT's make about \$38,000/year, and dental assistants make just over \$41,000. And I haven't even mentioned the many socially conscious individuals in this generation who prize a career served for the public good over financial pursuits.

Many in my generation would take and have taken lower paying jobs that give them a sense of fulfillment over a higher paying job that would bring them little joy. Many of my peers have gone into social services, non-profit and they look for organizations with a cause that they believe in, even if those occupations result in less pay than they would earn in other fields. Last year Connecticut passed a law allowing the creation of benefit corporations. B corps are a classification that allows a for-profit company to tie not just profits but community betterment to its legally



defined goals. My fiancé filed to be a B corp the day the law passed. James Woulfe, who lobbied for the bill is on the YES Steering Committee as is Chris Brechlin who also filed to be a B corp.

They are not unique. There are many in my generation that place higher emphasis on good deeds and doing good and there are many places in this country and across the world where they can achieve positive impact in their communities. Even though we would willingly take lower paying jobs in exchange for greater work/life balance and happiness with our careers, we won't be able to stay in Connecticut, a state that has the 6th highest housing costs in the country.

8-30g is a tool to have towns create more affordable homes if they have few or none. We shouldn't be weakening that kind of tool at a time when people like me, my friends, colleagues and people in YES are deciding whether to build lives and careers in CT. I would love to stay here and my friends feel the same way but not if we can't find affordable choices.

With that in mind, I would like to point out that it would be a shame for Connecticut to lose out on many talented and hard working individuals simply because the state put greater value on an individual's ability to afford to live here rather than the vast, positive, collective impact their involvement could accomplish in growing this state.